

Environment

Protecting Open Space Lands

Acquiring open space lands is important for our environment and quality of life; protecting and maintaining such land is just as important. House Bill 5447, "An Act Concerning Encroachment on Open Space Lands," authorizes civil actions against those who would encroach upon open space lands by building, clearing or tree cutting without consent. It includes serious penalties for illegally damaging or cutting trees on protected lands. I co-sponsored the bill. (Public Act 06-89)

Clean Cars

In our ongoing local effort to address greenhouse gas emissions and global warming, the legislature passed Senate Bill 660, "An Act Concerning Clean Cars." The bill requires the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner to develop a greenhouse gas labeling program for new cars (2009 model year and after) sold or leased in Connecticut. This will help raise awareness about a crucial issue. (Public Act 06-161)

The "Preserve"

I continued to work in a bipartisan fashion to secure state funds for public acquisition of the "Preserve," a unique, 1,000-acre subcoastal forest in Old Saybrook, Essex and Westbrook. This is a critical issue for the region.

Shoreline Erosion

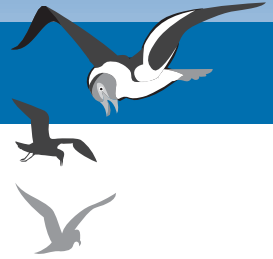
House Bill 5803, "An Act Concerning a Pilot Program to Evaluate Shoreline Erosion," funds and establishes a test program for two Connecticut beaches to employ new technology that reverses beach erosion. Erosion is a serious problem that affects the quality of the beach as well as endangering property and fragile seaside ecosystems. (Special Act 06-8)

Environmental Review of Surplus State Lands

The granting of an option to buy the vast Norwich State Hospital site in Preston to the Town of Preston for \$1 brought to my attention a gap in our laws. While environmental review is required before the start of large projects involving state funds that might affect the environment, no such review is required when the state disposes of its lands. The taxpayers have a right to know what their government is selling (or even giving away) and the right to comment. I worked on a bill that would require such reviews, and it passed the senate on the last session day. There was not enough time to pass the bill in the house before adjournment, but I plan to introduce the bill again. (Senate Bill 188, "An Act Concerning Environmental Review of Certain State Land Transfers.")

Local Revenue for Open Space and Smart Growth

As in past sessions, I submitted legislation to give towns the ability to create a revenue stream for open space, farmland preservation, recreational fields, shoreline access and affordable housing. The bill would complement last year's initiative to raise state funds for these purposes, and allow towns to partner with the state and private groups. The bill was approved by the Environment Committee, but did not make it to floor. I will continue to work on this concept, which has been successful in other environmentally sensitive areas in New York and New England. (House Bill 5744, "An Act Concerning a Pilot Revenue Program for Community Preservation and Investment in the Connecticut River and Niantic River Gateway and Eight Mile River Watershed Areas.")



GOOD GOVERNMENT

Freedom of the Press

This year I was pleased to introduce, author and shepherd through the House and Senate House Bill 5212, "An Act Concerning Freedom of the Press." HB 5212 created a news reporter "shield" law for Connecticut. The law will prevent news reporters from being compelled to reveal confidential news sources or information in court except under extraordinary circumstances. News reporters prefer to receive information on the record, but sometimes sources are afraid to come forward for fear of retaliation, embarrassment or the loss of a job. These whistleblowers provide critical information that the public needs and deserves to know about their government and other important institutions. Watergate is a prime example, but closer to home local reporters relied on confidential sources while reporting on the scandal involving former Governor Rowland. Recently, however, in Washington and around the country, prosecutors and litigants have sought to force reporters to reveal sources under the threat of contempt of court, and jail. With our Freedom of the Press Act in place, the public will know they can come forward with critical information, and that reporters will not be forced by third parties to reveal their identities. The law will make Connecticut a leader in promoting the free flow of information to the public. This new law has been recognized statewide as a tool for promoting good and honest government. (Public Act 06-140)

Campaign Finance Reform Improvements

Last December, after many years of hard work, I helped to pass the sweeping campaign finance reform bill. That law, beginning in 2008, will change the way we finance state elections. It provides for a voluntary system of public financing of gubernatorial, constitutional officer and legislative campaigns. While truly a piece of landmark legislation, the new law had some flaws.

Senate Bill 66, "An Act Concerning the Campaign Finance Reform Legislation and Certain Election Law and Ethics Provisions," tries to address some of the bills shortcomings. Most importantly, the bill amends a provision that would have made it very easy to invalidate the new law if someone obtained even a short injunction (suspension of the law) while mounting a legal challenge. The bill also lowers the barriers for third party candidates who wish to participate in the program and receive public financing. The bill adds important restrictions and reporting requirements for so-called caucus and leadership political committees that could make in-kind (non-monetary) contributions to campaigns. This bill made a good law better, and I was pleased to cosponsor it. (Public Act 06-137)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION

Fostering a healthy economy and promoting job growth were at the top of the agenda this year. Public Act 06-83, "An Act Concerning Jobs for the 21st Century:"

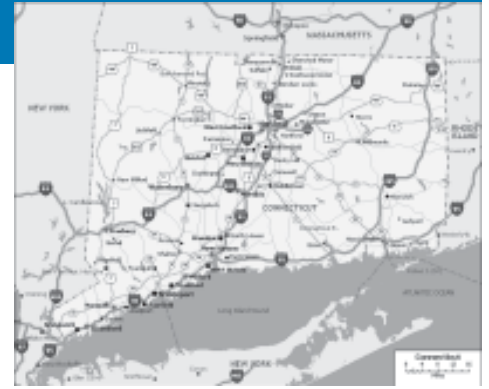
- Exempts all manufacturing machinery and equipment from the local property tax after a five-year phase out with a reimbursement program for towns.
- Establishes incentives for small business growth through programs at the University of Connecticut and targeted grants.
- Creates a loan reimbursement program for engineering graduates and doctoral graduates in key fields.
- Establishes a program of tax credits to promote the growth of the media and film industry in the state.
- Authorizes tax credit programs for companies that relocate to Connecticut and create new jobs, and companies that hire and retain workers laid off by other employers.

The budget bill repealed the temporary corporate tax surcharge. These measures will help Connecticut become more competitive in a global marketplace.

TRANSPORTATION

Roadmap for Connecticut's Economic Future

Anyone who drives along I-95 or other major arteries is aware of Connecticut's acute transportation crisis. In addition to being inconvenient, our transportation problems harm the economy, and make it harder to attract business. This year, building on a measure passed last summer, the General Assembly and Governor Rell worked together to pass House Bill 5844, "An Act Concerning the Roadmap for Connecticut's Economic Future." This bill authorizes bonding to make a \$2.3 billion dollar investment in our transportation infrastructure. The bill will promote mass transit projects including restoring commuter rail service between New Haven, Hartford and Springfield, Massachusetts; rehabilitating rail cars for that line, the New Haven Line and Shoreline East; making capital improvements along the New Haven line and implementing the New Britain-Hartford busway. The bill includes a provision I have personally proposed for several years—a comprehensive study regarding potential expansion and improvement of Shoreline East service.



The bill also requires a study of mobility needs in eastern Connecticut. While the bill does not ignore the need to improve our roads, in focusing on public transportation the bill takes a forward thinking approach. This bill is the most significant transportation investment in 20 years. (Public Act 06-136)

EDUCATION

School Nutrition

Senate Bill 373 bans the sale of soda and sugary drinks in schools, and provides incentives to school districts to provide healthier snacks. This bill will help address childhood obesity. It's one small step, but better eating overall and more active lifestyles are also needed. (Public Act 06-63)



College Savings

A new law will allow taxpayers to deduct contributions to the Connecticut Higher Education Trust (CHET) from their adjusted gross income for state income tax purposes. House Bill 5845 will make it easier for parents to save for college. (Public Act 06-186)

Work left to do . . .

The legislature passed a bill that begins to address concerns about the use of eminent domain for economic development. A new law will create an Office of Ombudsman for Property Rights. The ombudsman will be charged with helping property owners with eminent domain procedures, mediating disputes between property owners and public agencies over the use of eminent domain or relocation assistance and recommend changes in eminent domain laws to the legislature. Several bills were approved by committees that would restrict the use of eminent domain and establish procedural safeguards, but were not taken up by the House or Senate before adjournment. Work will continue in this area.

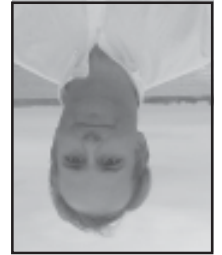
High energy prices are a serious concern for families and businesses alike. Proposals were considered to try to reduce prices through conservation, development of alternative energy sources and changes to the energy market. Since adjournment, two productive energy summits have been held to bring together experts to address this vital, complex issue. Connecticut should become a leader in working toward energy independence.

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Please Keep in Touch

Summer, 2006

Dear Neighbor:

I am pleased to write today with information about the 2006 regular session of the General Assembly. The legislature met this year from February 8 until May 3.

Considering the compressed schedule this year, the legislature made significant progress on a number of key issues. Each year thousands of bills are proposed, and perhaps 200 are passed. In this newsletter, I will describe some of the major new laws, and share my views with you. I will also report on the legislation I proposed and worked to pass, and will touch on some of the items that the legislature did not reach this year, and will require future work.

You have received, or will shortly be receiving, an additional newsletter from me devoted to the budget.

Our four small towns, Chester, Deep River, Essex and Haddam, are among the most beautiful, livable and historically significant communities in Connecticut. It is truly a privilege to be the voice for our remarkable corner of the state in Hartford.

The next legislative session begins next January. I would like to hear from you about your concerns and ideas for our towns and state.

I wish you and your family the best for an enjoyable summer.

Sincerely yours,

James F. Spallone
State Representative, 36th District

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